

# Veteran Updates

News and updates on Veterans issues from the San Francisco VA Health Care System • November 2017

## San Francisco VA Medical Center Sends Off Veterans Participating in the Project Hero Challenge

San Francisco VA Medical Center staff had the distinct honor of sending off Project Hero riders this past weekend who gathered from across the country, and around the world. More than 125 wounded military Veterans, First Responders and supporters will cycle more than 450 miles from San Francisco to Los Angeles starting this past Sunday October 15 through Saturday October 21. Voluntary Service provided a wonderful opening ceremony with remarks from Director Bonnie Graham and Chief of Mental Health John McQuaid, PhD, to kickoff the 2017 UnitedHealthcare Challenge.

Project Hero was founded in 2008 as a national non-profit organization dedicated to helping Veterans and First Responders affected by injuries, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and traumatic brain injury (TBI) achieve rehabilitation, recovery and resilience in their daily lives. This September marked 10 years for Project Hero serving those who serve our country. From building and donating adaptive bikes and producing cycling events throughout the nation to supporting community-based rehabilitation and recovery programs and important medical and clinical research, Project Hero is making a difference in the lives of thousands of Veterans and First Responders, as well as their families and communities.

For more information, please visit [www.projecthero.org](http://www.projecthero.org)



SFVAHCS Director Bonnie Graham providing opening remarks to kickoff the 2017 Project Hero.

The common theme among Veteran riders is the camaraderie throughout the ride. Veterans explained how the Project Hero stet challenges helped them to open up with one another, along with raising awareness about PTSD, and their overall whole health benefits. Army Veteran Jimmy explained the whole health experience from riding these challenges:



*"I've participated in all Project Hero Challenges across the country except for the one in Texas. These challenges help me look at the big picture for myself; set my own goals, and build a healthy plan for my medical concerns. My VA doctor introduced me to Project Hero. These challenges have helped me fight the battle over type one diabetes. My VA doctor keeps telling me these challenges have improved my overall health physically and mentally. They've also allowed me to open up with other riders, and the road to recovery has been a big part for me. I work with my VA doctors, and they are great, but something about being around other Veterans allows me to open up more and we can relate with one another."*

Airman Ken Guthrie traveled all the way from Langley Air Force Base in Virginia to participate in his second Project Hero challenge. His first challenge was in Texas, thanks in part he said, to his Army friend asking him to join the challenge. "I ride to raise money and awareness for PTSD research, and in honor of my Grandfather, a Navy Veteran that served in Vietnam on marine patrol boats," said Ken.

This year marked SFVAMC's third Project Hero UnitedHealthcare California Challenge sendoff, and what a privilege it was. We cannot thank our Voluntary Service enough for their hard work in putting this sendoff event together, providing food and a warm sendoff for all the Project Hero riders.

# Staying Healthy During the Holiday Season

## How do you manage stress around the holidays?

The holidays are a time for fun, family, friends and festivities. But we all know that the shopping, concerns about budget, family feuds and hectic schedules can add stress. How do you manage stress around the holidays? There are many things we can do, including getting enough exercise and sleep, to remain tranquil and stay well during the holiday season.

### Here are some tips to manage stress and stay well this holiday season:

#### **Be Aware:** Holiday Blues/Depression:

Less daylight, increased demands from family and loved ones, and unhappy memories of holidays past can all make us feel down, depressed, or blue. It is normal to sometimes feel sad or lonely during these times. These feelings can persist if we tell ourselves it's the holidays and we are supposed to be happy. Know that there are things you can do that might help to improve your outlook and make things more manageable.



sleep in, get a massage, pedicure, sketch, plant flowers—in other words do things you like—just for you. Find something that clears your mind, slows your breathing and restores your inner calm.

#### **Take Action:** Get moving!

Why not start your New Years resolution a little early this year? Exercise can help combat the blues and is a great defense against any extra calories you might have eaten.

**Be realistic:** The holidays don't have to be perfect or just like last year. As families change and grow, traditions can change as well. Choose a few to hold on to, and be open to creating new ones.

**Stick to a budget:** Before you go shopping, decide how much money you can afford to spend and stick to your budget. It may be wise to suggest alternatives, like donating to a charity in someone's name, giving homemade gifts, or starting a family gift exchange.

**Learn to say no:** Saying yes when you should say no can leave you feeling resentful and overwhelmed. People will understand if you cannot participate in every activity.

**Make time for yourself:** Listen to your favorite music, stargaze, take a bubble bath, laugh, write in a journal, meditate, take a calming Yoga or Tai Chi class,

**Reach out:** If you feel lonely or isolated, seek out community, religious or other social events. They can offer support and companionship. Volunteering your time to help others is also a good way to lift your spirits and broaden your friendships.

**Mental Health Same Day Clinic:** For urgent services, Veterans in crisis may use our Mental Health Same Day Clinic Monday – Friday, 8 a.m. – 5:00 p.m. located on the Ground Floor, Building 203. Afterhours Veterans can be seen at the Emergency Department at 4150 Clement Street, San Francisco. Or call the Veterans Crisis Line, which connects Veterans in crisis, their families and friends with qualified, caring VA responders through a confidential toll-free hotline, online chat, or text. Veterans and loved ones can call (800) 273-8255 and press 1; or send a text message to 838255 to receive confidential support 24/7.

